

Single-Payer Healthcare Rises Again, p.5 | Who's Afraid of Rachel Corrie?, p.2

# THE INDYPENDENT

A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Issue #84

March 23–April 12, 2006

## ENEMY MINE

**Cambodian Veteran Wages War on Landmines**

Indydependent Exclusive by Sarah Stuteville, p.6



Alex Stonehill



**Songs From  
Coal Country**

p.10

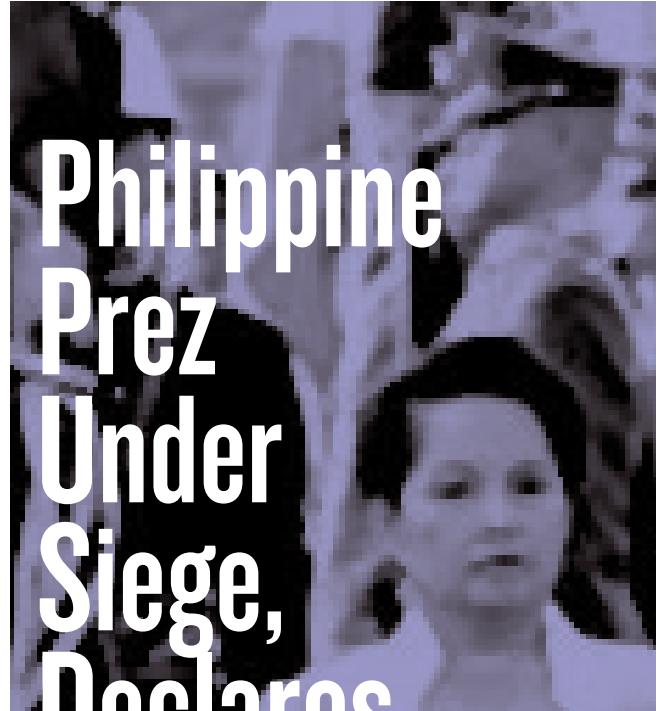
David Hollenbach



**Sweatshop  
Beads for  
Sweaty Boobs**

p.11

Barzizza



**Philippine  
Prez  
Under  
Siege,  
Declares  
'State of  
Emergency'**

p.9



## NEW YORK CITY INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

E-mail [imc-nyc-print@indymedia.org](mailto:imc-nyc-print@indymedia.org)

Web [indypendent.org](http://indypendent.org)

NYC: [nyc.indymedia.org](http://nyc.indymedia.org)

U.S.: [us.indymedia.org](http://us.indymedia.org)

GLOBAL: [indymedia.org](http://indymedia.org)

### Office & Mail

NYC Independent Media Center  
P.O. Box 1417  
NY, NY 10276

### WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 120 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

*The Indypendent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Indypendent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

### VOLUNTEER STAFF:

Kat Aaron, Chris Anderson, Steven Arnerich, Kazembe Balagun, Bennett J. Baumer, Jed Brandt, Mike Burke, Antrim Caskey, Rahul Chadha, Susan Chenelle, Erin Cohen, Ellen Davidson, Ryan Dunsmuir, Neela Ghoshal, Lauren Giambrone, Christopher Gunderson, A.K. Gupta, Irina Ivanova, Hanson Jones, Ruth Kelton, William Lindley, Dean Loren, F. Timothy Martin, Gary Martin, Diane Mason, Edgar Mata, Nik Moore, Ana Nogueira, Donald Paneth, James Powell, Nicholas Powers, Frank Reynoso, Karen Saville, Ann Schneider, Andrew Stern, John Tarleton, Xavier Tayo, Erin Thompson, Steven Wishnia, Amy Wolf, Kurt Wong, Christina Zawerucha

# Who's Afraid of Rachel Corrie?

BY JED BRANDT

If Israel is supposed to be the sixth borough of New York, then it's looking like the theater is another occupied territory. After the New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW) indefinitely postponed *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* in response to the "concerns" of unnamed Jewish organizations, the play's future is in question.

Alan Rickman's play was developed for England's Royal Court Theatre from the journals that American anti-occupation activist Rachel Corrie kept from the age of 12 up until the day in March 2003 she was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer set to demolish a Palestinian home in the Gaza Strip. Corrie, 23, was the first "international" to be killed while volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement, a non-violent direct action organization that attempted to obstruct the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

"I can only guess at the pressures of funding an independent theater company in New York, but calling this production 'postponed' does not disguise the fact that it has been cancelled," Rickman said in a statement.

The script is not yet commercially available in the United States, but if the rave reviews of the British press can be taken at face value, a serious work of art has been suppressed, at least for the moment, in the United States. According to *The Guardian*, over "the course of 90 minutes you feel you have not just had a night at the theater: you have encountered an extraordinary woman."

For those closely following the "row," we've instead been treated to the entirely unextraordinary personage of James Nicola, the NYTW's queasy artistic director.

When Rickman went public, decrying what he called "censorship," Nicola first responded



**ROCKING THE CRADLE:** Meagan Dodds plays Rachel Corrie in the UK Royal Court Theatre production. Photo: Stephen Cummiskey. (right) Rachel Corrie in the days before her death by bulldozer.



should be heard," Rickman said.

The month before she was killed, Corrie wrote to her parents: "I look forward to seeing more and more people willing to resist the direction the world is moving in, a direction where our personal experiences are irrelevant, that we are defective, that our communities are not important, that we are powerless, that our future is determined, and that the highest level of humanity is expressed through what we choose to buy at the mall."

Responding with something of a theatrical intifada, activists have staged several readings of Corrie's journals around the country, including a major showing at the Riverside Church on March 22 with Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Suheir Hammad, Danny Hoch, Eve Ensler and Howard Zinn.

*Check rachelswords.org for more info.*

by denying that the play was set to open in March, adding that "after Ariel Sharon's illness and the election of Hamas, we had a very edgy situation," before denying that outside pressure played any part in his decision. "We found that our plan to present a work of art would be seen as us taking a stand in a political conflict that we didn't want to take."

Outrage was swift in England, with Vanessa Redgrave calling it "political cowardice," and threatening to take the NYTW to court over her investment in the production.

After pressure from both sides of the Atlantic that one receptionist at the theater called "overwhelming," Nicola amended his early hedges by saying, "We were trying to do whatever we could to help Rachel's voice be heard."

There is still no date or guaranteed venue for the play's opening.

"Whether one is sympathetic with her or not, her voice is like a clarion in the fog and

# 4th Amendment, ha ha ha

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

The ironies of the wiretapping scandal are almost too many to count. First, even Colin Powell said Bush should have requested a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court warrant, since the law gives him three days to seek retroactive approval. Less well known is the fact that FISA gives the President 15 days following the declaration of war to seek either a warrant from the court or a change in law from Congress.

The fact that the spying disclosures came as Congress was debating extension of the PATRIOT Act begged the question: How could the administration insist it needed legal authorization from the PATRIOT Act to fight terrorism when it had authority under the FISA it wasn't bothering to invoke? And never mind the irony of the *New York Times'* self-censorship in waiting a year at the behest of the administration to reveal the surveillance to the public.

The greatest irony is that Bush simply admitted that he violated the FISA statute, becoming the first sitting President to admit an impeachable offense.

In so doing, Bush farcically repeated the history of the Nixon administration. In his autobiography, the late Arthur Kinoy tells the story of Detroit antiwar activists being spied upon illegally. When it came to light, the Rehnquist Justice Department asserted that it had the right to conduct illegal activities in defense of national security.

The Supreme Court thought otherwise, however, unanimously rejecting this proposi-

tion in no uncertain terms. Apparently Bush's sycophant legal advisors forgot to tell him about this binding precedent.

"We conclude that the Government's concerns do not justify departure in this case from the customary Fourth Amendment requirement of judicial approval prior to initiation of a search or surveillance. Although some added burden

will be imposed upon the Attorney General, this inconvenience is justified in a free society to protect constitutional values. By no means of least importance will be the reassurance of the public generally that indiscriminate wiretapping and bugging of law-abiding citizens cannot occur."

As Dick Cheney puts it in a recent interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, "In the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, there was a concerted effort to place limits and restrictions on presidential authority." Former Watergate co-conspirator John Dean tells of an interview Cheney gave to NPR, in which the Veep actually cited his own dissent published in the Iran-Contra report, which was the result of an 11-month congressional investigation into CIA coke- and gun-running in Nicaragua. Cheney, who was vice-chair of the investigating committee, authored a minority report that said that the Reagan administration's failures to abide by the law were simply "mistakes in judgment and nothing more." Sounds like "Trust us. We're protecting you."

### Handschi Update

The NYPD is sparing no effort to gut the warrant requirements of the Handschi consent decree, which prohibited police from spying on political groups. One year after agreeing to respect demonstrators' First and Fourth

Amendment rights, the NYPD unilaterally issued Rule 47, saying it can photograph and videotape public demonstrations and retain the footage indefinitely "for training purposes." The cops say they need this surveillance only for that limited purpose, but in their legal briefs, they argue that the Constitution does not prohibit the police collecting information at demonstrations.

National Lawyers Guild attorneys say it looks like the NYPD wants no restrictions on its activities, and each time the City comes back with arguments like this, the more it proves our contentions. Come to court on Tuesday March 28 at 10:00 a.m., 500 Pearl St, courtroom 17-C to see how this battle develops.

*The People's Lawyer is a project of the New York chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. nlg.org*

## LETTERS

Send comments to: PO Box 1417, NYC 10276

Email to [imc-nyc-print@indymedia.org](mailto:imc-nyc-print@indymedia.org)

### BUT WHO SPEAKS FOR THE ROACHES?

I am very dismayed to see Bennett Baumer's recommendation of a book about killing rats in the latest issue of the *Indypendent*. Rats have lived here far longer than we have, so it is we who are invading their homes, not the other way around.

He emphasizes the chapter about killing rats more than the main content of the book, which is to give an objective history of rats in NYC. Clearly, Baumer has taken the book and skewed it to create his own propaganda, as if rats need to be vilified any more than they already are.

I am very, very disappointed to see such disrespectful and speciesist writing in *The Indypendent*.

*Wendy Scher*



PHOTOS: FredAskew.com

## World Protests Mark Three Years of War

**H**undreds of thousands of people staged hundreds of protests throughout the world against the war in Iraq. Antiwar organizations decided to leave it up to local peace groups to organize this round so they could focus their resources on the major protest on April 29 in Manhattan.

Here in the city, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Bronx Educators and Students to Stop the War shut down the armed forces recruitment station at Fordham Road and Grand Concourse on March 18. The following day, ANSWER led a march on the same recruitment station.

In Times Square, 17 were arrested at a protest organized by the War Resisters League. Across the country in Eugene, Ore., antiwar protesters confronted Senators Ron Wyden (D) and Gordon Smith (R) as well as Congressman Peter DeFazio (D) over their financial and legislative support of the war. Law enforcement officers arrested 18 protesters, including eight high schoolers. Tens of thousands marched in central London and throughout the world, focusing on the Iraq War, but also weary of U.S. intentions towards Iran.

—Bennett Baumer



# IndyKids Overcomes NY Library Ban

BY AMANDA VENDER

**A** new project of NYC Indymedia, *IndyKids*, has been censored by the Queens Public Library. After distributing more than 3,000 copies of the second issue of *IndyKids* to all 63 branch libraries, the Queens Public Library now refuses to distribute the paper. The library says the reason for its decision is that *IndyKids* is not balanced. Similarly, the New York Public Library refused to distribute *IndyKids*' second issue. Perhaps influenced by several letters it received from parents and teachers, the New York Public Library says it will now distribute the current issue to a total of ten branches in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. There has still not been a response from the Brooklyn Public Library on whether it will distribute *IndyKids*.

While both the Queens and New York Public Libraries complained of *IndyKids*' lack of balance, a look at the periodicals offered at the area libraries shows a striking bias. For example, *Faces: People, Places and Cultures* has a special March 2006 issue devoted to Afghanistan. The glowing description of the situation there defies all media and government reports indicating growing attacks, suicide bombings and drug trafficking. The publication states: "The United States military trained more than 25,000 Afghan troops so that the Afghans could better protect their own country. Schools, hospitals, roads and towns are being rebuilt. Girls are allowed to



attend schools, and people are free to do their business. Today, Afghanistan is a relatively stable country."

Another, *Biography Today Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers* September 2005 issue, calls Pope John Paul II "the charismatic 'people's pope' who helped topple Communism while championing Catholic values and a culture of peace."

The *O'Reilly Factor for Kids*, by the extreme right-wing Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly, can be found at a number of branches.

In addition, the libraries' periodicals for children feature numerous ads for video games, candy and sports wear, and generally carry the message: "life is good, have fun and play sports."

*IndyKids* believes that it is fine for the library to carry publications with a particular point of view, but the library should not pretend that these are balanced and exclude other points of view. As a public institution supported with taxpayer dollars, the libraries

*IndyKids* asks that you visit your local branch library and ask them to carry *IndyKids*. Please write to the main Queens library and ask that it make *IndyKids* and all diverse points of view accessible to the public.

### Contact:

Roseanne Cerny  
Coordinator, Children's Services  
Queens Library

89-11 Merrick Boulevard  
Jamaica, NY 11432  
[rosanne.cerny@queenslibrary.org](mailto:rosanne.cerny@queenslibrary.org)

**Join us** in handing out *IndyKids* in front of the Queens Central Library at:

89-11 Merrick Boulevard, Jamaica  
Subway: F to 169th St  
Saturday, March 25 (rain date: April 1)  
2:00-3:30pm

**IndyKids Bake Sale**  
Support *IndyKids* and distribute papers!  
Union Square South (14th St),  
Manhattan  
Saturday, April 15 (rain date: April 16)  
2:00-5:00pm

*For more information on *IndyKids* and to download the paper, go to [www.indykids.net](http://www.indykids.net). To order copies for your school write to *IndyKids* at [indykids@indymedia.org](mailto:indykids@indymedia.org) or call 212-592-0116*

## Local Briefs

### LOWER EAST SIDE TENANTS WIN

Tenants at 47 East 3rd Street, where the landlord hatched an eviction scheme to convert their entire building into his personal mansion, have won a permanent injunction against eviction in the New York State Supreme Court. The landlords Alistair and Catherine Economakis wanted to empty the 24 tenants from the 15-unit, five-story building to create a home for themselves, their baby and nanny. The Economakis blueprints called for five bedrooms, six bathrooms, a personal gym, and a private library. *The Independent* broke the story in April 2005 about how the Economakis used a loophole in the rent stabilization code that allows the landlord to recover some apartments for family use. If the Economakis had won and then decided to scrap their mansion plans and re-rent the apartments at market value, there would have been little penalty according to tenant lawyer Stephen Dobkin. The tenants incurred over \$150,000 in legal fees to defend their homes.

### NYPD TOUGH LOVE FOR TEENS

Though crime is down across the nation, there has been a 30 percent increase in arrests of young people since 2005 according to the Department of Probation. NYPD reports that between Jan.-Sept. 2005 it cuffed 8,763 young people under 16, a 12 percent increase from 2004.

Of those arrests, more than 4,000 were felonies, including murder, rape, robbery, grand larceny, assault and car stealing. According to *City Limits*, the increase in juvenile arrests is linked to the zero tolerance policy in public schools and NYPD scrutiny of high crime areas. Incidents such as school yard fights that a principal handled in the past are now increasingly being referred to the court system, commented Patricia Brennan, deputy commissioner for Family Court Services at the Department of Probation to *City Limits*.

### GRIEVANCES GONE NOWHERE

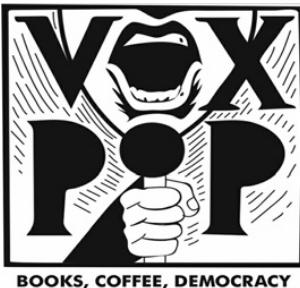
NYU graduate students filed grievances against the university administration for docking their pay for two semesters in retaliation for striking. Weeks into the strike last semester, NYU President John Sexton issued an ultimatum that any graduate student who didn't return to work would face the pay cut. When NYU refused to negotiate a second contract with the graduate students' union, graduate students lost their third-party grievance system. "The administration has said to graduate employees that they don't need a union contract – that the university can provide a procedure that will settle grievances internally," said Maida Rosenstein, president of the graduate students' union United Auto Workers Local 2110, in the NYU student newspaper. "But in three weeks they haven't been able to tell what the first steps of this procedure are."

### YESHIVA DEAN NO EINSTEIN

An openly gay medical student at Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine is suing the administration for anti-gay harassment. The student, Jeevan Padiyar, was dismissed from the college at the end of last semester and new evidence in his legal case suggests administrators discriminated against him. A signed confidential memo by a head dean to a Padiyar supporter reportedly said, "Dean Purpura continues to remain concerned about your support of an openly gay student. Irrespective of the actual events involving Mr. Padiyar, our donors cannot accept publicity from students of this type."

### WAL-MART EYES ANTI-UNION CAMPAIGN ON FALLEN LABOR LEADER

New York Central Labor Council president and Queens Democratic assembly representative Brian McLaughlin was arrested for alleged labor racketeering crimes related to rigging city electrical contracts. McLaughlin, who came out of the electrical union IBEW Local 3 in Queens, recently purchased and renovated a million-dollar house in Long Island with alleged illicit earnings. Under McLaughlin's direction, the labor council led a coalition of small businesses, politicians, unions and environmental activists against Wal-Mart building in Rego Park, Queens.



BOOKS, COFFEE, DEMOCRACY

VOXPONET.NET 718.940.2084  
718.940.2084

All shows no cover with 2 drink minimum.

**FREE MUSIC  
COLD BEER  
FREE READINGS  
GOOD WINE  
INSTA•PRESS  
SNACKS  
FREE WIRELESS  
FAIR TRADE  
FREE PEOPLE  
GOOD BOOKS**

1022 CORTELYOU RD  
2.5 BLOCKS OFF THE Q TRAIN (CORTELYOU RD. STOP)  
**BROOKLYN**



PHOTOS: CHRIS GEOVANIS

## Immigrants not Criminals: Chicago Rally

**O**n Friday March 10, much of Chicago was paralyzed by an immigrant rights march estimated at 250,000 people. Organized by a coalition of community, labor and immigrant rights groups, the march was called to protest an anti-immigrant bill currently before Congress.

Protesters carried hand-lettered signs saying "We are America," "My Mexican immigrant son died in Iraq," "Don't deport my parents," "I'm a dishwasher – not a criminal," and "Si, se puede!" The crowd stretched two and half miles, from Union Park on the West Side to the rally destination in Federal Plaza.

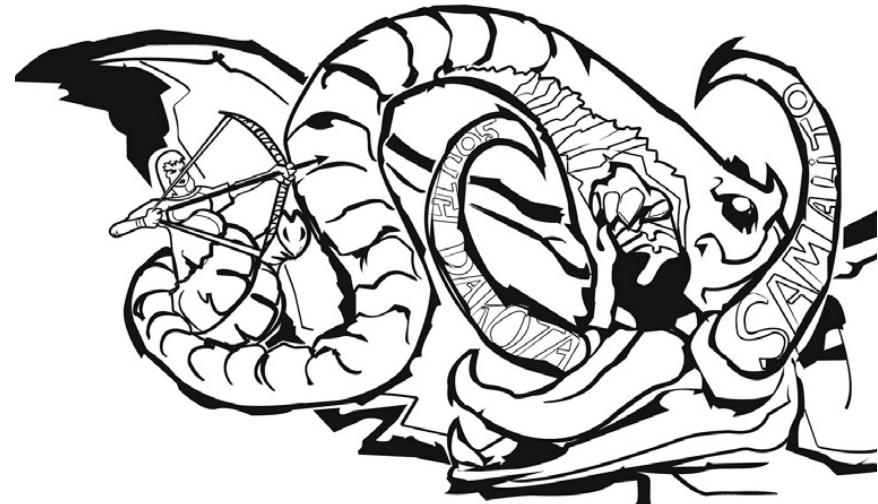
The Border Protection Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act has been approved by the House of Representatives and is currently being considered by the Senate along with several other similar pieces of legislation. The bill threatens to criminalize those assisting undocumented immigrants as "alien smugglers" and to turn undocumented status from a civil violation to a federal aggravated felony. It includes such measures as enlisting the help of military and local law enforcement in stopping illegal entrants and authorizes the construction of a fence along parts of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Chicago march was the product of months of work by dozens of community organizations. Further immigrant rights rallies are scheduled for Los Angeles on March 25, Trenton on March 30 and Philadelphia on April 10.

In addition, according to the Pueblo Sin Fronteras website, a million immigrant march on Washington, D.C., is being planned for October of this year.

*From Chicago Indymedia, with additional reporting from NYC Indymedia and Philadelphia Indymedia.*

## KILLING ROE: Death by a Thousand Laws



Jose Carmona

BY KIM GANDY

**W**ith the recent enactment of a South Dakota law banning all abortions except to save the life of the woman, the fight to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and end all abortions is very real and it is now well under way.

And, to make things worse, wily conservatives, determined to wage and win the war against women, haven't pinned their plan on South Dakota alone; in 16 other states they are pushing laws on the books or bills under consideration that are similar to the law in South Dakota.

But not every conservative wants an immediate challenge to *Roe* in the Supreme Court. Some want to continue pursuing the strategy that has been successful so far – and has made access more and more difficult. This is especially true in rural states like South Dakota and Mississippi, where the lone clinic in each state already has to fly doctors in to perform abortions. Here's an excerpt from a recent editorial in the *National Review*:

"Pro-lifers have gained ground over the last decade and a half by pursuing a savvy incremental strategy. That strategy puts the end of *Roe* within sight. If *Roe* falls, pro-lifers should then try to persuade the public in each state to prohibit most abortions. After that, they should try to persuade them to prohibit abortion in the case of rape and incest. To try to collapse this multi-stage process into an instant is to ignore social and political circumstances, and to throw away patiently and painfully won political victories for the sake of an emotional gesture."

But they're not in unison. When I debated Tony Perkins, head of the Family Research Council, on *Hardball*, he flatly denied that the group has any interest in a federal abortion ban that would apply in every state. The Family Research Council wants an outright overturn of *Roe*, not a federal statute that could be revoked by a pro-choice congressional majority.

Laws like the one in South Dakota, without an exception for the health of the woman, have been overturned time and again by a Supreme Court with O'Connor

on the bench. But O'Connor is gone, and our rights may follow because the right has gotten its way.

Need more proof that the radical right is pulling all the strings? Read Sam Alito's letter to Focus on the Family President James Dobson, reported by the *Associated Press*:

"This is just a short note to express my heartfelt thanks to you and the entire staff of Focus on the Family for your help and support during the past few challenging months," Alito wrote. "As long as I serve on the Supreme Court I will keep in mind the trust that has been placed in me."

What ever happened to an "independent judiciary"? I can't decide what's more frightening: that a Supreme Court justice wrote such a grossly inappropriate letter or that it hasn't resulted in an outcry. Like every other piece of news that gives me the chills, this has been largely brushed under the rug and I am fuming.

*Kim Gandy is the president of the National Organization for Women. The original version appeared at [www.now.org](http://www.now.org).*

### Lending Products

Credit Cards  
Personal Loans  
Co-op Loans  
Mortgage Loans  
Business Loans

### Financial Products

Savings Accounts  
Free Checking  
Share Certificates (CD)  
Business Accounts  
Debit and ATM Cards  
Financial Education

### About Your Credit Union:

-Mission Driven  
-Not-For-Profit  
-Member Owned  
  
-Community Oriented  
-Reinvests money in the community & members  
  
-Friendly and Convenient  
-A safe, sound and democratic alternative to traditional banks



For more information visit us at [www.lesfcu.org](http://www.lesfcu.org) or call us at 212.529.8197!

...and More!

37 Avenue B, New York, NY 10009

Tel: 212.529.8197  
Fax: 212.529.8368  
Open: Tues-Fri  
10:00-3:00 pm  
Thurs 4:00-7:00 pm  
& Sat 10:00-1:00 pm

134 Avenue C, New York, NY 10009

Tel: 212.598.0022  
Fax: 212.598.0288  
Open: Mon, Wed,  
Fri 1:00-7:00 pm

## Remembering ANNE BRADEN

Longtime antiracist and peace and social justice activist Anne Braden died March 6 at the age of 81.

Braden and her husband Carl first attracted public attention in 1954, when they bought a house in an all-white Louisville, Ky., neighborhood on

behalf of a Black couple. When the house was dynamited, the subsequent investigation focused on the Bradens' political beliefs; Carl spent seven months in jail for sedition before his conviction was overturned.

The Bradens went on to join the civil rights movement, mobilizing white support as part of the staff of the Southern Conference Educational

Fund, as well as working with Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They also worked against the Vietnam War and for women's equality.

Carl died in 1975, but Anne never stopped her activism. "Braden's primary message was the centrality of racism in the U.S. social fabric," according to the account of her life

from the Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, which she co-founded. She was also outspoken about the need for antiracist work among white leftists.

*Donations in her memory may be sent to the Kentucky Alliance, payable to the Carl Braden Memorial Center, Inc., P.O. Box 1543, Louisville, KY 40201.*

As healthcare costs continue to grow, employers are slashing benefits and adding to the ranks of uninsured. George W. Bush's prescription is to implement a series of market-based initiatives aimed at further privatizing health care.

But in the opinion of Rudy Mueller, an internist with a rural practice in Jamestown, New York, privatization is the problem. He says bluntly, "Markets kill people."

Mueller is the author of *As Sick as It Gets*, a scathing critique of healthcare in America, and a member of Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), a 14,000-member group that has been pushing for nationalized health insurance since 1987.

"I had a 53-year-old man with no health insurance. He had chest pains. He waited three days to go to the hospital. He died," said Mueller, as he recounted a list of his patients who had been killed, permanently disabled or almost died due to a lack of insurance. "The people who are the most likely to get sick in society are the elderly and the poor."

Not having health insurance means you're more likely to get sick. It also means your likelihood of dying is 10 to 15 percent higher than those with insurance.

Billie Spaight, who lives in Queens, knows the perils of being uninsured. Her husband suffers from epilepsy and had to wait six months to get coverage under his employment insurance. She says one day he "had a seizure at work and had to have stitches." Spaight says he was unable to see a neurologist until her mom gave her \$600. "We had to bring that in cash just to get to a neurologist to get a medication adjustment."

Spaight is a member of Health Care-Now!, a coalition of groups including PNHP, the United Steelworkers and the United Methodist Church, which are building support for H.R. 676, a healthcare reform bill that was introduced in 2003 by John Conyers (D-Mich.).

The plan, which currently has 68 co-sponsors, would institute a "single-payer" national program that would extend a more generous version of Medicare to all Americans and convert the for-profit healthcare industry into a not-for-profit system over 15 years. Funding would come from taxes for existing programs, a 3.3 percent payroll tax on employers, a five percent tax on the top five percent of earners, as well as a tax on all stock and bond transfers.

Group advocates are quick to clarify that it would not be nationalized medicine; doctors wouldn't be working for the government, just paid by them. "What we're suggesting is Medicare for all," said Marilyn Clement, the executive director of Health Care-Now!. "Very enhanced, improved Medicare that provides much, much more."

### The High Price of No Prevention

The cost of a dysfunctional healthcare system can be found in hospital emergency rooms across the country, which are used increasingly as a stopgap for the 46 million uninsured.

At BryanLGH in Lincoln, Nebraska, 38 percent of emergency room visits are for non-emergency reasons.

Tom Hoover, an 11-year veteran nurse of emergency rooms in Lincoln, warns that "hospitals will end up closing their emergency rooms because of those percentages of people who don't have insurance and can't afford to pay."

"Healthcare costs are out of control, the largest majority of that is because of underinsured or non-insured patients," said Hoover. "We want to reduce those costs, thus decreasing the costs for everybody [by] getting the [uninsured] to a primary care physician that knows them."

Hoover is working on just such a program, which aims to provide primary care to high-frequency emergency room patients. Enrolling these patients in a healthcare program such as Medicare or Medicaid has already decreased emergency room visits by the high-frequency users by 68 percent.

# Single-Payer Plan Rises Again

Per capita, Americans spend more on healthcare than citizens in any other country – \$6,280 as of 2004. Meanwhile, the U.S. system is one of the worst in the developed world, ranked 37th in 2000 by the World Health Organization.

In 2004, Government funding covered 42 percent of healthcare expenses, through programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Administration. Out-of-pocket consumer spending (not including premiums, which are considered part of the insurance industry's contribution) accounted for 15 percent, while private insurers covered about 40 percent.

"In general I support [a single-payer system], because I see it working," said Dr. Alec Pruchnicki, a doctor of geriatrics and a member of PNHP. "The government pays the bills. The government doesn't run my practice.... I know the rules; I don't have to guess as to... what's going to be covered and what isn't. So I can run my practice fairly efficiently and easily."

Pruchnicki has been a primary care physician to 125 seniors at the Lott Assisted Living Facility in uptown Manhattan for two years. Since Pruchnicki began providing on-site care to residents, the number of hospital days and hospitalizations have been decreased by 41 percent and 35 percent, respectively, without an increase in deaths or transfers.

"The whole idea... is that you provide primary care and you prevent worse things from happening," he said.

Even for those with health insurance, the costs can be enormous. John Knapp works at an industrial battery charger plant in Lincoln and takes home about \$18,000 a year. With a pre-tax deduction of \$130 every two weeks, a deductible and co-payment, he can wind up paying \$5,000 a year for healthcare.

With his wife in need of medical care, however, Knapp is happy just to have coverage. He became involved in the Health Care-Now! movement after realizing how difficult it is to get insurance. "Having a job with insurance didn't come easy by any long shot. An employer I used to work for had insurance for me but not for my wife, due to the pre-existing practices of the insurance companies," he said. "Later, [when] my wife became insured through Medicaid. I had to watch what I earned."

As healthcare costs continue to increase, rising to 16 percent of the gross domestic product or \$1.9 trillion in 2004, premiums are rising and employers are cutting back or eliminating benefits altogether. In 2004, employer-based premiums soared 11.2 percent, five times the rate of inflation. Five million fewer Americans had employer coverage in 2004 than in 2001, as employer coverage declined from 65 percent to 61 percent.

### Market Madness

Keeping his promise to promote a more "consumer-driven" healthcare system, President Bush's 2007 budget freezes funding for children's health programs, and eliminates \$35 billion in funding for Medicaid and \$116 billion for Medicare over the next decade.

The budget also provides \$156 billion in tax subsidies for individual health savings accounts (HSAs), high-deductible insurance policies that allow individuals to deposit funds tax free into an account to fund the deductible.

The idea is that by offering equal tax incentives to individuals and employers, the plans will take the burden off the employers to provide insurance, while lower premiums cou-



Keeping his promise to promote a more "consumer-driven" healthcare system, President Bush's 2007 Budget freezes funding for children's health programs, and eliminates \$35 billion in funding for Medicaid and \$116 billion for Medicare over the next decade.

pled with high deductibles will allow more people to afford coverage. Because contributions, investment growth and withdrawals for health-related expenses are all tax free, this makes them more beneficial than Individual Retirement Accounts, where taxes must be paid either before contributing or after withdrawal.

To qualify for an HSA, you must first purchase a high-deductible health plan (HDHP), otherwise known as a "catastrophic" plan. For 2006, these plans will have a minimum deductible of \$1,050 for an individual and \$2,100 for a family. Under Bush's proposal, a family would be able to deposit up to \$10,500 a year into a health savings account.

### Tax Shelters for the Wealthy

Yet critics say these plans are really investment vehicles for the wealthy. Few Americans can afford to put thousands of dollars a year into HSAs. Even if they do, the cost of a

chronic illness would quickly wipe out the savings, leaving policyholders to fall back on the "catastrophic" insurance policies that tend to cover less, relegating more expenses to the policyholder.

Everyone else will be forced to seek out traditional coverage in a shrinking insurance pool. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that the President's HSA proposals will motivate employers not to offer traditional health coverage, leaving another 600,000 people without coverage.

"It's going to take the healthy and wealthy out of traditional insurance pools," said Olveen Carrasquillo, who is an Assistant Professor of Medicine and Health Policy at Columbia University and the Director of the Columbia Center for the Health of Urban Minorities. He is also on the steering committee for Latinos for National Healthcare Coalition, which formed in 2005 to work with Health Care-Now! to lobby Latino lawmakers into supporting H.R. 676.

"When you have a lot of people leaving the private insurance sector, you're going to have the sick staying in these traditional plans. Premiums are going to go through the roof."

### The Tipping Point

Currently, Health Care-Now! is trying to make healthcare reform into an electoral issue by holding Citizen's Congressional Hearings across the country. They hope to create a "groundswell" of local support that will galvanize politicians into passing H.R. 676 by 2008.

"If your congressperson is not responsive to the issue of healthcare for everybody, then start looking for a new one," said Marilyn Clement. "Nothing can happen as long as the Republicans are in control," said Clement. "It can't be discussed. Nobody will put it forward for a hearing."

For more info, go to [healthcare-now.org](http://healthcare-now.org)

# Local Solutions to the Energy Dilemma

April 27-29, 2006 in NYC



## A Peak Oil Conference for NYC

Sponsored by Peak Oil NYC, Local Energy Solutions LLC and the Five Borough Institute (a 501c3 organization)

The Conference has two goals:

1. To inform the public that energy prices are rising because of "Peak Oil," the point at which production stops increasing and goes into permanent decline.
2. To discuss realistic, sustainable local responses to the situation.

## Speakers & Panelists

Over 30 authors, energy experts, ecologists & sustainability specialists including:

<b>John Darnell</b>	Energy and Environment Projects Coordinator for Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD)
<b>Catherine A. Fitts</b>	Former Federal Housing Commissioner at HUD
<b>Derrick Jensen</b>	Author, <i>The Culture of Make Believe</i>
<b>Michael Klare</b>	Author, <i>Resource Wars and Blood &amp; Oil</i>
<b>James Kunstler</b>	Author, <i>The Long Emergency</i>
<b>Geoff Lawton</b>	Permaculture Consultant & Teacher, Permaculture Research Institute
<b>Faith Morgan</b>	Filmmaker, <i>Cuba - Artificial Peak Oil: Transformation of a Society</i>
<b>Dale Allen Pfeiffer</b>	Geologist and Science Journalist
<b>David Pimentel</b>	Prof. of Ecology and Agricultural Sciences, Cornell Univ.
<b>Michael Ruppert</b>	Author, <i>Crossing the Rubicon</i>
<b>Matt Savinar</b>	Author, <i>The Oil Age Is Over</i>

## Additional Information

### Conference Location

Day 1 - Thursday, 4/27/06  
Community Church of NYC  
40 East 35th Street  
NY, NY 10016

Days 2 & 3 - Fri/Sat, 4/28-29/06  
Manhattan Center's  
Grand Ballroom  
311 West 34th Street  
NY, NY 10001

Registration 8 - 9:30am every day

### Purchase tickets online at:

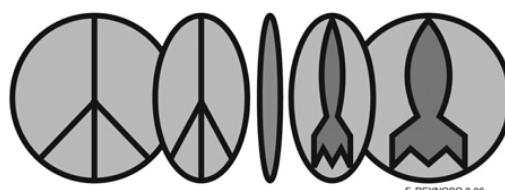
[www.energysolutionsconference.org](http://www.energysolutionsconference.org)

### For further information contact:

Local Energy Solutions LLC /  
Five Borough Institute  
PO Box 654  
New York, NY 10116

Phone: 845.639.8304  
[info@energysolutionsconference.org](mailto:info@energysolutionsconference.org)

# Democrats Bomb Again



F. REYNOSO 3-06

BY BRUCE GAGNON

**T**he *Boston Globe* reported on Feb. 20 that the Democrats have put Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), a former Army officer, in charge of coming up with a consensus Democratic plan for the war. His answer? It's called "strategic redeployment." What does that mean? "It's important to note that it's not withdrawal – it's redeployment," Reed said. "We need to pursue a strategy that is going to accomplish the reasonable objectives, and allow us to have strategic flexibility. Not only is it a message, but it's a method to improve the security there and around the globe."

The plan is to pull some U.S. troops out of Iraq and redeploy them to Kuwait, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa. From Kuwait, the U.S. Air Force would increase bombing missions over Iraq, and the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles like the Predator, which flies via satellite direction and can drop bombs and fire missiles. For the Iraqi people this means more indiscriminate bombing and more innocent people killed.

When things really get out of hand in Iraq, the "strategic redeployment" plan (it's just the John Murtha plan with a new name) calls for U.S. Special Forces teams to go back into Iraq for quick hits and killings of anyone who dares resist the corrupt government the United States has put into place.

With congressional elections looming next fall, the Democrats will sell this to the American public by saying they are pulling the troops out of the war. A few units will be brought home and big ceremonies held so that the public thinks the war is slowing down. The Democrats hope that "strategic

redeployment" will mean fewer troops killed in Iraq. They hope it will be their ticket to victory in November. But in truth the war will go on.

In fact, more territory will be occupied by U.S. forces and the field of operations against that faceless "terrorism" will be expanded. All this will be done with the Democrats' full encouragement and support. And guess what? The Pentagon will need a lot more money for new bases and outposts and members of Congress – both Republicans and Democrats – will turn over the money.

The peace movement should not fall for this bait and switch. The Democrats are running an election game. They are feeling the pressure and this is their disingenuous response. Peace activists nationwide must uncover this shell game and call it for what it is: strategic deception.

The time has come for the peace movement to unembed itself from the Democratic Party. As long as peace activists see themselves as "party" people they will not have the ability to be critical of these kinds of cynical moves to co-opt our energies.

*Bruce Gagnon is the coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space. For more: space4peace.blogspot.com*



**BHOPAL CLEAN-UP DEMANDED**

**BHOPAL**, India—Bhopalis are on a 500-mile march to New Delhi, protesting the lack of redress to the 1984 industrial accident that has claimed more than 15,000 lives. The most urgent demand is to supply piped water from the Kolar reservoir to 16 communities affected by toxic contamination of groundwater. Despite a May 2004 order of the Supreme Court, the state government has failed to provide safe drinking water and nearly 320,000 people continue to drink water containing cancer-causing chemicals.

*For more, see bhopal.net/march*

## FMLN Keeps San Salvador

BY BENNETT BAUMER

**M**ore than 3 million people voted in El Salvador's national elections, where both the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance Party (ARENA) saw gains in the national parliament. Throughout the country, polls opened late amid international reports of irregularities and violence.

An International Observer Mission press release listed inflation of voter rolls, voting by foreigners, and buying of votes as irregularities, mainly benefiting the right. The FMLN increased its deputies in the National Assembly from 29 to 32, while ARENA garnered the most seats of any party with 34.

The FMLN also picked up some municipalities in ARENA strongholds, but lost others amid cries of electoral fraud. Critics say ARENA utilized state resources and its connections in the corporate media to redbait leftists and play on people's fears.

In a tight mayoral election in the capital of San Salvador, FMLN candidate Violeta Menjivar declared victory on March 17. The FMLN has held the San Salvador mayor's office for the past six years.

Worried about election fraud and vote tampering by ARENA, FMLN partisans filled the

central plaza on March 16 in the capital until the Supreme Electoral Tribunal declared Menjivar the winner.

The mayoral election was in doubt for days as the ARENA-controlled electoral tribunal delayed announcing the results due to "logistical" issues. The delay created speculation that ARENA was manipulating ballots and the police responded to the FMLN protest with violence. Adding fuel to the fire, Salvadoran President Tony Saca pronounced the ARENA mayoral candidate the winner days before the electoral tribunal's final decision.

International observers, including the Organization of American States and the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, criticized Saca for interference and trying to sway the electoral tribunal. All told, when the ballots were counted, Menjivar won San Salvador by 44 votes.



PHOTOS: JÉRÉMIE CANAVESIO

## French Youth Erupt Over Changes to Work Laws

Major economic problems in France gave rise to huge street demonstrations in March. Workers, students, intellectuals and other citizens hit the bricks in many cities. The immediate cause was a new law, sponsored by the Chirac-deVillepin government, which would permit employers to fire young people without cause for two years after they were hired. French unions are threatening a general strike. Premier deVillepin's political career is on the line. He has said the government is prepared to alter the job legislation but not to change it. The youth unemployment rate is reported to be 20 percent.

BY DONALD PANETH

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y.—Attempting to decipher events in the Middle East, it is necessary to bring together a large number of factors — among them, the intensifying violence in Iraq, the U.S.-Iran nuclear dispute, a U.S.-Iranian agreement to hold direct talks on the sectarian struggle in Iraq, an impending Hamas-Israel collision, the intricacies of diplomatic, political, and regional negotiations, and the atmosphere of secrecy and confusion, uncertainty and apprehension that obscures all of these circumstances.

As peace demonstrations took place in New York, London, and other cities across the globe on the third anniversary of the U.S.-British invasion of Iraq, U.S. defense chief Donald Rumsfeld declared in a *Washington Post* op-ed piece on March 19 that to withdraw from Iraq would be like handing Germany back to the Nazis after World War II.

Critics ridiculed the Rumsfeld statement as clumsy U.S. propaganda, an invidious comparison, implying that peace protesters were displaying swastikas rather than "No War" banners.

Well-informed U.N. sources and many others described the rising political-sectarian-resistance conflict in Iraq as civil war. Members of the Bush administration and the British defense minister denied that contention.

The issue of Iran's compliance with the 1970 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) moved into a new phase on March 17 with the U.N. Security Council taking up a report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) at a closed-door session.

Following the meeting, diplomats told reporters that the Council was near agreement on a text reaffirming that Iran should comply with calls from the IAEA and seeking a further report from IAEA Director-General Mohammed ElBarede.

Council discussions had centered on a February IAEA report expressing concern that "uncertainties related to the scope and nature of Iran's nuclear program have not been clarified after three years of intensive Agency verification."

A 15-day deadline for an Iranian reply was being considered.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov was reported to have suggested that such a deadline would put the U.S. in position to attack Iran by June, should it choose to.

"I know how the Security Council works," Lavrov had previously explained. "You start with a soft reminder, then you call upon, then you require, then you demand, then you threaten. It will become a self-propelling function."

A U.S. attack on dispersed Iranian nuclear facilities, observers here said, would be by air. U.S. troops, bogged down in Iran and Afghanistan, could not undertake a land invasion.

Western mass media generally omit to mention that the major nuclear powers — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States — are, themselves, in violation of the NPT, having failed to reduce significantly or eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Nor is there mention that the United States has explicitly violated Articles I and II of the treaty against transferring "to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly." According to a February 2005 report from the Natural Resources Defense Council, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands "today store U.S. nuclear weapons at their national air bases."

Other nuclear states — Israel, India and Pakistan — are not parties to the NPT and are getting away with it, as is North Korea which has withdrawn its adherence to the treaty. Iran alone is being held to account.

Multiple catastrophes are building up in the Middle East.

## Philippines

# Under Popular Pressure, Gloria Arroyo Regime Declares "State of Emergency"

BY AMANDA VENDER

It was Feb. 24, the 20th anniversary of the famous "People Power Revolution" that brought down the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, and Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was desperate.

In February 1986 just the right mix came together: hundreds of thousands of Filipinos took to the streets, joined by the powerful Catholic Church and the business class. The final push came when disgruntled high-ranking military officers renounced their allegiance to Marcos, and the U.S. government withdrew its support from the dictator.

With Filipinos planning to commemorate the anniversary, Arroyo was worried that history was repeating itself. So Arroyo issued Presidential Proclamation 1017 on Feb. 24, declaring a "State of Emergency." She claimed that high-ranking military officers were working with the left to stage a coup. Reminiscent of Marcos's martial law, Arroyo's decree banned street demonstrations, shut down the *Daily Tribune* newspaper, placed troops outside the TV station ABS-CBN, arrested a progressive congressman and threatened to arrest five other lawmakers.

Arroyo came to power in 2001 when

"People Power II" ousted the scandal-ridden presidency of Joseph Estrada. In 2004, Arroyo used a vote-padding scheme to steal the presidential election. The fraud was exposed last year, adding to anger over her regime's corruption, human rights abuses, and failures to address crippling poverty, stagnant wages and unemployment. Last summer it seemed that a popular movement could score a victory in ousting a third president, but it was unable to force Arroyo from office.

Observers cast doubt on an attempted coup, however. Military personnel said that they only wanted to show their opposition to Arroyo and the left said it wanted to commemorate "People Power I."

Professor Jose Maria Sison of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, a united front of revolutionary organizations, said, "There is nothing wrong for any group of the military and police of the reactionary government to seek and have an alliance within the broad united front against the Arroyo regime, provided the military and police forces stay within the limits of respecting democratic rights and upholding civilian supremacy."

Arroyo received criticism internationally, including from the Bush administration. Indicative of the power the United States

holds in its former colony, soon after a senior U.S. diplomat paid Arroyo a visit, she lifted Proclamation 1017 on March 3. Since then little has changed: the warrantless arrests, ban on rallies and media censorship continue.

Public anger with Arroyo has been growing. Last year, 174 activists, movement lawyers and church people were killed. Poverty has deepened, leading more Filipinos — now an astonishing 10 percent of the population — to seek work abroad. The presence of 5,500 U.S. troops in the Philippines has also drawn considerable opposition, and many Filipinos see a link between the growing human rights abuses and the presence of foreign forces.

Progressive forces in the Philippines say their goal is to gain enough strength to overthrow the government for good and end U.S. dominance. During a recent visit to New York, Father Rex Reyes, program secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, explained that in the process of ousting presidents, "True leaders do not just appear, but are born in the process of a genuine struggle for revolutionary change. That is why Christians have to stay in the struggle. This is where we show hope."

For more information see nispop.org, Network in Solidarity with the People of the Philippines.



## Middle East Approaches Meltdown

**STUDENT RESISTANCE**

*Revolution in the Air* Max Elbaum

**FEMINIST THEORY**

**bluestockings**  
radical bookstore | activist center  
fair trade cafe  
172 ALLEN ST. • 212.777.6028  
bluestockings.com

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

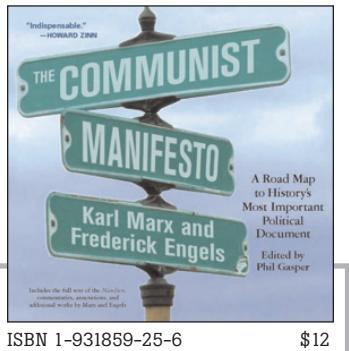
Sunday, April 2nd @ 2:30pm - Free  
**Feminist Book Club: "How The  
Pro-Choice Movement Saved  
America"** Open to all genders,  
political persuasions and levels of  
familiarity with feminism.

Thursday, April 6th @ 7pm - \$5 to  
\$10 Suggested  
**Screening: Reel Venus Film  
Festival** Showcase. Selected shorts  
from previous Reel Venus Film  
Festivals!

Saturday, April 8th @ 7:30pm - \$5  
to \$10 Suggested  
**Performance: Professor Louie  
and the Jeff Lewis Band**

Thursday, April 13th @ 7PM - Free  
**Reading: Michelle Tea and Katia  
Noyes.**

Friday, April 14th @ 7PM - Free  
**Reading: Toward a Post-capitalist  
Politics - Feminist  
Inspirations**  
Is there life after capitalism?



This beautifully organized and presented edition includes the full text, commentaries, annotations, and additional works, bringing the text to life for both students and the general reader.

KARL MARX AND  
FREDERICK ENGELS  
EDITED BY PHIL GASPER

**The Communist  
Manifesto**  
A Road Map to History's  
Most Important Political  
Document

"Gasper's new edition of *The Communist Manifesto* comes at a critical moment in world history, when a global capitalism that Marx described with amazing accuracy a hundred and fifty years ago shows all the signs of disarray that he predicted. Gasper brings alive one of the great classics of modern political thought, an indispensable addition to anyone's library."

■ Howard Zinn, author, *A People's History of the United States*

Order from

**Haymarket  
Books.org**

**@-string**

# Coal Miners' Daughters Sing Songs of Solidarity

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

*They say in Harlan County  
There are no neutrals there  
You're either with the union  
Or you're a thug for J.H. Blair  
Which side are you on?  
Which side are you on?*

**S**eeing Florence Reece sing that song, "Which Side Are You On," a cappella in a cracked old-lady voice was one of the high points of the movie *Harlan County USA*, a Barbara Kopple documentary on a 1974 coal miners' strike in Harlan County, Ken.

Reece, a miner's wife, wrote the song on the back of a calendar after police ransacked her home during a strike in the winter of 1931-32. She took the melody from a minor-key hymn.

"Which Side Are You On?" and other songs from the film's soundtrack appear on *Coal Mining Women* (Rounder). The album comprises 1970s recordings by two generations of Appalachian women, older ones like Reece and Sara Ogan Gunning (who once wrote a song called "I Hate the Capitalist System") and younger ones such as Hazel Dickens and Phyllis Boyens.

I was listening to this a lot over the winter, with the December transit strike and the spate of coal-mining disasters in January. The most appalling thing I experienced during the transit strike was the complete lack of solidarity I saw from the office middle class, from ostensibly liberal people who voted against George Bush but had absolutely no sympathy for other working people. "We're getting screwed over worse, so why are these people complaining?" was their logic. "We don't get pensions, all we have is a shitty 401(k), and we haven't had a raise in two years. The subway workers have it good."

The logical answer to that is "Why don't YOU join a union?" But these people are terrified even to think the word "union." Compare that with the people of Harlan County, who stood up in the middle of a highway against gun thugs and cops trying to

run them over. Yeah, they may have had bad seventies-era hillbilly-hippie haircuts and gotten pregnant at 15, but they had guts.

This music reflects that. It's music of life and death. Often death. Of Lawrence Jones, a Harlan County miner shot in the face by a scab during the 1974 strike, a haunting dobro wafting under Phyllis Boyens' lines about a life that "can shatter just like ice." Of United Mine Workers dissident Jock Yablonski, murdered in 1969 by home invaders hired by the union's corrupt leader, memorialized by Hazel Dickens in a sprightly banjo tune. Of Sara Ogan Gunning's baby, who starved to death during the Depression; she changes "Precious Memories" to "Dreadful Memories." Of the 78 miners killed in a fire at the Mannington mine in West Virginia in 1968,

remembered in a mournful mandolin waltz. (That disaster inspired federal mine-safety legislation. Guess which president gutted its enforcement.) But this music isn't fatalistic or nihilistic. It's got a purpose, imbuing organizing with the righteousness and foursquare chord changes of gospel. "Let's sink this capitalist system in the darkest pits of hell," sings Ogan Gunning.

This music also comes from community. The "pickin'" tradition of people getting together to play acoustic is probably stronger in the Southern Appalachians than it is anywhere in the nation. Whether music of any emotional power and political validity can come out of the commercial music process instead of such a community has long been disputed by cultural critics. Well, it never was as impossible as the purists contend, but the accelerating concentration of ownership of music distribution, radio, and concert promotion has made it a lot harder. The cruel paradox of the music business is that it is extraordinarily difficult for musicians to have any cultural influence beyond a niche market (let alone make a living) without going through the corporate star system — and the corporate star system inexorably turns them into celebrity product.

And Harlan County is no longer a hotbed of labor radicalism. It voted 60 percent for Bush in 2004.

"I see a darkness," Johnny Cash sang. There is a darkness in the land. And 74 years after Florence Reece scribbled on the back of her calendar, Texas country singer James McMurtry captures America's darkness with a track called "We Can't Make It Here." It blows through my brain like a cold north wind through an empty prairie town, streets of boarded-up storefronts deserted but for a few emaciated tweakers, while out by the Interstate the fluorescent lights of the Wal-Mart blaze down upon piles of Chinese sweatshop goods. It's a seven-minute jeremiad growled over a laconic, twangy three-chord groove, an apocalyptic epic like Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall" only a lot more direct.



Should I hate a people for the shade of their skin?  
Or the shape of their eyes or the shape I'm in?  
Should I hate 'em for having our jobs today?  
No, I hate the men sent the jobs away  
I can see them all now, they haunt my dreams  
All lily-white and squeaky-clean  
They've never known want, they'll never know need  
Their shit don't stink and their kids won't bleed  
Their kids won't bleed in their damn little war  
And we can't make it here anymore

## Made In Palestine

MADE IN PALESTINE

THROUGH APRIL 22

THE BRIDGE

521 W. 26TH ST.

MADEINPALESTINE.NET

If the essence of art is freedom of expression, then framed in the context of its national legacy of *al Nakba* (the Catastrophe), Palestinian art is, in essence, an expression of freedom denied," says

Tarif Abboushi. He is referring to *Made in Palestine*, a dazzling exhibition documenting the struggles of the Palestinian people.

It seems unbelievable, but no art venue in New York City would house this honest look at the Palestinian resistance as seen through the eyes of 23 contemporary Palestinian artists living under occupation or in exile. But with the New York Theater Workshop's last-minute decision to cancel a play about the life of Rachel Corrie, perhaps it's just part of a larger trend of artistic self-censorship. The show organizers were undaunted, however, and marshaled funds to rent gallery space to bring *Made in Palestine* to the city.

Among the commanding, museum-quality works on display are political prisoner Zuhdi al-Adawi's *Massacre Will Not Bring Our End*; Rajie Cook's *Ammo Box: A Time to Cast Stones*; Samia Halaby's *Palestine: From the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River*; John Halaka's *Stripped of their Identity, Driven from their Land*; Emily Jacir's *Refugee Tent Memorial to Palestinian Villages Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied*; and Mary Tuma's *Homes for the Disembodied*.

—Lucine Kasbarian



(at right) Artist: Mary Tuma. Title: *Homes for the Disembodied*, 2000. Medium: 50 continuous yards of silk, 13'x25'.

# Terrorism Is Cool

V FOR VENDETTA

DIRECTED BY JAMES McTEIGUE

**A**s a revolutionary work of political art, *V for Vendetta* is a great comic book movie. Adapted from an acclaimed early eighties DC comic by Alan Moore (who's distanced himself from this and other films of his work, such as *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *From Hell*), the film desperately wants to be embraced both as a genuinely subversive, topical call-to-arms and a blockbuster action movie experience. This contradiction proves fatal, but it's also what makes this admirable failure more engaging than the average comic book adaptation.

Don't let all the talk of controversy mislead you: This is less the story of a terrorist-hero blowing up buildings (though that's here too) than of his mentoring a hot girl in need of political reawakening.

They meet cute: the Guy Fawkes – masked V (Hugo Weaving) rescues young Evey (Natalie Portman) as she's about to be gang-raped by fascist cops on curfew duty. He quickly swoops her up to a rooftop to watch his detonation of the Old Bailey, a seemingly inexplicable move until we learn via flashback that Evey is the child of activist parents abducted by the government right before her eyes.

When V hijacks the state-controlled TV station to broadcast his revolutionary message, Evey helps him escape and they retire to his underground lair filled with banned cultural artifacts to, regrettably, fall in love.

Despite strong work by both leads, the love story is ridiculous, mostly because V has no actual face while Evey's is too perfect. But in its overly theatrical vision of a dystopian future, complete with gullible media, bio-weapons, big pharma conspiracies and massive government cover-ups, the film is playfully relevant.

Just don't listen to any *Matrix* dorks: as before, the Wachowskis (who wrote and produced



Alan Moore

this while their second-unit director, James McTeigue, took the reigns) have reduced big ideas to easily inhaled bong hits for poli-sci undergrads. And like *The Matrix*, the film works better as a pop culture blender than a philosophical treatise – serious thought will kill the buzz.

That the film succeeds halfway is a credit to the Wachowskis' affectionate translation of the comic's own mainstream subversion (as with his beloved *Watchmen* and the Batman graphic novel *The Killing Joke*, Moore's best work is provocative only within a commercial context). With its deep rich colors and noir shadows, the film captures a slick, graphic novel sheen while the all-British supporting cast, including Stephen Rea as a bedraggled

inspector and John Hurt as the Big Brother-ish chancellor, double as intertextual references.

Somewhat unexpectedly, this is also the most LGBT-friendly comic book movie yet: Stephen Fry plays a helpful, closeted talk show host, Evey's reawakening-via-torture sequence is cross-cut with the heartrending tale of a doomed lesbian, and V and Evey share a last dance to an Antony song.

As for the terrorist-as-hero, the film sidesteps a key issue by conveniently removing innocent people from the buildings (as V claims, the structures here are just symbolic). It's the expected cop-out from a film that, in the end, prizes schlock entertainment over genuine political debate.

—Charlie Bass

# Abortion's Saving Graces

HOW THE PRO-CHOICE MOVEMENT SAVED AMERICA

By CRISTINA PAGE  
BASIC BOOKS, 2006

**M**s. Page, a National Abortion Rights Action League staffer, assembles scientific studies and sociological facts to show that women are happier, babies are healthier and fathers are more involved since the dawn of the pill.

More boldly, she claims that the actions of the "pro-life" lobby around the country are actually increasing the need for abortion, by spreading lies and ignorance about birth control. She claims there is not one "pro-life" group that supports the use of birth control. For instance, she quotes the founder of the American Life League saying, "We've been working for over a year to

prove that prescription contraceptives have nothing to do with a woman's health and well-being but are recreational drugs that prevent fertilization and abort children."

Page's slim volume is full of alarming statistics that should motivate men and women who enjoy sex to redouble their efforts to preserve access to abortion. As Page told a small crowd at Bluestockings bookstore recently, "There are more laws permitting pharmacists to refuse to fulfill a birth control prescription than there are members of Pharmacists for Life."

Since Samuel Alito was confirmed, five more states have passed bills eliminating abortion. Thirty-four states already have fetal protection laws. In Texas, after a 17 year old could not obtain an abortion, she asked her boyfriend to help her by standing on her stomach. She miscarried, and her

"There are more laws permitting pharmacists to refuse to fulfill a birth control prescription than there are members of Pharmacists for Life."

boyfriend is now serving a life sentence because that state deems a fetus a person.

Page credits Clinton's pro-choice administration for reducing the abortion rate to the lowest in history. Yet currently, the United States has the highest number of teen pregnancies among the developed world, with the Bush-friendly states of Texas and Florida ranking as two of the top five states with high teen pregnancy rates.

—Ann Schneider



Duane

# Sweatshop Beads for Sweaty Boobs

MARDI GRAS: MADE IN CHINA

DIRECTED BY DAVID REDMON

**F**or the average man at Mardi Gras, beads are payment mementos draped over the beer-bottle collection in college dorms or just as easily discarded to the street after the party is over. The beads are cheap trinkets, but their production comes at a heavy price. *Mardi Gras: Made in China* examines the trail of global commerce and exploitation from the sweatshops of China's Fujian province (where the beads are made) to the orgiastic streets of New Orleans.

The filmmaker, David Redmon, gained access to the bead factory, its boss and the mostly female workforce. Over time, he got the boss to trust him enough so he could interview the women without supervision. The women attest to 14-hour workdays with rest coming only in the tightly packed bunks of the factory dorm.

The film's original score amplifies the brutal monotony of sweatshop labor through a remix of mechanical noises recorded from the factory. In true gonzo style, Redmon juxtaposes the worker footage with Mardi Gras debauchery, relentlessly driving home the disparities in class and privilege. The Mardi Gras tchotchkes, sometimes plastic penis charms, are also used to explore gender exploitation, which, considering the content, seems almost too easy.

Redmon notes that 1978 was both the year capitalism was unleashed in China (with the "to get rich is glorious" affirmation) and when the tradition of "beads for boobs" began at Mardi Gras. Yet the film leaves you almost relieved that you live on the "show your tits" continent. He fosters this sentiment by quoting women who love showing their tits, who see it as a liberating and empowering act.

The film tries to delve into China's market reforms, which have broken up families in the countryside and produced massive wealth disparities. He contrasts the boss's modern residence with the workers' meager block home.

Apart from statistics about protests throughout the country, however, the film provides little context of the enormous social and labor upheavals convulsing China. In interviews with the filmmaker, the plant boss indicts himself on the deplorable sweatshop conditions. He admits to docking the workers' pay, punishing them like so many naughty children. Yet Redmon tends to depict these young women as if they are children. When they are not at work, they are shown dancing in their dorm rooms, not organizing for better labor conditions. A strike is mentioned only peripherally.

The film works in its quest to humanize the face of consumer-driven global capitalism, but misses in its analysis of the struggle against it.

—Bennett Baumer

*Mardi Gras: Made in China* is showing at Cinema Village on East 12th Street through March 30.

# events

march & april

**Sunday, March 26**

\$10 for adults, \$7 seniors, \$5 students • 2:00-5:00pm  
**SCREENINGS AND DISCUSSION WITH FILMMAKER WILLY LINDWER CHILD IN TWO WORLDS: THE STORY OF JEWISH WAR ORPHANS, THE LAST SEVEN MONTHS OF ANNE FRANK**  
Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Plaza • Purchase tickets online at [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org) or call 646-437-4202.

**Monday, March 27**

FREE • 8:00pm  
**CODE PINK PRESENTS A DELEGATION OF IRAQI WOMEN**  
Featuring Dr. Entisar Mohammad Ariabi Graduate Student Lounge on College Ave, behind Au Bon Pain at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, NJ • Suzan Sanal, 908-507-0268

**Tuesday, March 28 and April 4 (and every Tuesday afterward)**

\$20 • 7:30pm  
**A.F.R.A.I.D. (A MUSICAL DRAMA IN TWO ACTS)**

Set in New York City in 1858, the satirical opera, newly expanded and revised into two acts, is narrated by the critical voice of historical New York City journalist Fanny Fern. Includes characters from Cult for True Womanhood, and the Tyrannical American Females for Righteousness, Abasement, Ignorance & Docility (A.F.R.A.I.D.), to servants, prostitutes, and laborers.

The Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Ave (at President St), Brooklyn

**Wednesday, March 29**

FREE • 8:00-9:30pm  
**COMEDY: MINTYFRESH PRESENTS "COCKTAIL: A BLEND OF COMEDY STYLES"**

Otto's Shrunken Head, 538 East 14th St, Manhattan

FREE • 6:30-9:30pm  
**MINGLE/AWARD THANG**  
Young Nonprofit Professionals Network fourth anniversary event. Social Lounge, 795 Eighth Ave (between 48th and 49th Streets), 3rd floor • [www.ynpnyc.org](http://www.ynpnyc.org)

**March 31st and April 1st**

\$10-\$25 • 8:00pm  
**BENEFIT PERFORMANCE OF HOWARD ZINN'S PLAY "MARX IN SOHO" TO BENEFIT AUTONOMEDIA, A NYC RADICAL SMALL PRESS**  
Brecht Forum, 451 West St (between Bank and Bethune), Manhattan • Reservations and information: 718-963-2603 • [www.autonomedia.org](http://www.autonomedia.org)

**Friday, March 31 thru Sunday, April 2**

**WOMEN, ACTION & THE MEDIA CONFERENCE**

Making Noise, Making Change.

Keynote speakers: Farai Chideya, Maria Hinojosa, Caryl Rivers.

Hosted by the Center for New Words. Bringing together more than 300 participants for over two days of meetings and exchanges of observations, ideas, experiences, opinions and tools for change – and to plan together for action.

MIT's Stata Center, Cambridge, MA • 617-876-5310 • [www.centerfornewwords.org](http://www.centerfornewwords.org)

FREE • 10:00pm-4:00am

**FAREWELL SOCIAL COMEDY SHOW**

Sweat returns to The Delancey tonight, bringing a whole bunch of DJs and some free Heineken with them.

The Delancey, 168 Delancey, Manhattan

**Saturday, April 1**

FREE • 7:00pm

**FREE RIDE TO FIRST SATURDAY**

Meet in Union Square (south side) at 7:00pm or the Brooklyn side of the Williamsburg Bridge at 7:30pm. Ride ends at Brooklyn Museum. BYO bike!

**Monday, April 3**

FREE • 7:00pm

**ARTIST BOOK PRESENTATION: KAREN FINLEY'S GEORGE & MARTHA**

Karen Finley's first book in six years, an illustrated political satire that imagines an affair between George W. Bush and Martha Stewart.

McNally Robinson Booksellers, 50 Prince St, Manhattan

**Monday, April 3**

FREE • 6:00-8:00pm

**THE HURRICANE & THE NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS**

Including Jimmy Guidry, Director of LA Dept of Public Health; Ellen Lukens, VP for Policy at the National Assn. of Public Hospitals; and Ed Thompson from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Advanced registration is required; contact the Wagner School at NYU. Please bring photo ID.

The Puck Building, 295 Lafayette St, 2nd Floor, Manhattan

**Thursday, April 6**

FREE • 7:00pm

**TIMES UP! MINGLE**

Monthly Volunteer Meet and Greet at Times Up! a radical environmental action and bike collective.

49 East Houston St (between Mott and Mulberry), Manhattan

FREE • 7:00pm

**CONFRONTING THE FRAUDULENT ELECTORAL VOTE**

State Senator Liz Krueger will speak on the battle over voting technology and the campaign to keep elections in New York State free from fraud and deception. She will be joined by Bo Lipari, director of New Yorkers for Verified Voting.

Community Church of New York, 40 East 35th St, Manhattan • [www.ccny.org](http://www.ccny.org)

**Friday, April 7**

FREE • 6:00-8:00pm

**GLOWLAB BRINGS CHRISTINA RAY TO A BLANK ART SPACE**

She will create a large-scale audio-visual experience based on physical impact. Choose your damage.

DCKT Contemporary Gallery, 552 West 24th St, Manhattan

FREE • 7:00-9:00pm

**POETRY, PROSE & ANYTHING GOES**

The Mad Hatters' Review brings their inaugural "anything goes" reading series to KGB tonight. Expect the dark, twisted side of the NY literary scene.

KGB Bar, 85 East 4th Street

**Friday, April 7**

\$12 suggested donation • 7:00pm

**FRED HO & THE AFRO ASIAN MUSIC ENSEMBLE**

In concert with el maestro poet Raul Salinas from Austin, Texas. Living legend "el maestro" and "poet laureate of the East Side" Raul Salinas, at over 72 years of age, is one of the preeminent poets of Chicano-Native American literature and a veteran revolutionary activist.

St. John's Lutheran Church, 155 Milton St, Greenpoint, Brooklyn • [www.jerichony.org](http://www.jerichony.org) • 212-760-4980

FREE • 10:00pm

**CENTRAL PARK MOONLIGHT RIDE**

Columbus Circle (SW corner of Central Park, at the intersection of Broadway, Central Park South/59th St, and Central Park West)

**Saturday, April 8**

FREE • 9:00pm

**PROSPECT PARK MOONLIGHT RIDE**

Grand Army Plaza, where Flatbush Ave, Eastern Pkwy, Union St and Prospect Park West all intersect. Sponsored by Times Up!

**Sunday, April 9 and Monday, April 10**

FREE • Sunday 2:00pm-12:00am, Monday 7:00pm-12:00am

**FREEDOM FESTIVAL**

The First Annual Freedom Festival is a totally free and completely independent music festival (bands in the lineup so far are Earl Greyhound, Vague Angels, Pyradical, Rockwell Rockwellian, The Exit, La Vernissagerie and Honky Tonk Happy Hour).

The Cake Shop, 152 Ludlow St • The Living Room, 154 Ludlow St, Manhattan

**Saturday, April 15**

FREE • 12:30pm

**SOUTH BRONX PEOPLE'S ENVIRONMENTAL TOUR**

Meet at Brook Park, 141st St and Brook Ave, the Bronx

**Wednesday, April 18**

FREE • 6:00pm-8:00pm

**LECTURE: THE HURRICANE AND THE NEW ORLEANS CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

With Dr. Laura Steinberg, former professor of Civil and Environmental Infrastructure at Tulane University; Aaron Vile, campaign director at the Gulf Restoration Network. Advanced registration is required; bring photo ID. The Puck Building, 295 Lafayette St, 2nd Floor, Manhattan

**Thursday, April 19 thru Sunday, April 23**

**BROOKLYN UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL**

The Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Ave (at President St), Brooklyn • For schedule visit: [www.brooklynunderground.org](http://www.brooklynunderground.org) after April 1

**Saturday, April 22**

FREE • 9:30am

**THE EIGHTH ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE BIKES**

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, West 110th St and Amsterdam Ave, Manhattan

**Ongoing until May 28**

**SHOCKING & AWFUL**

FREE for solo viewing of the Peace Tower and "Shocking & Awful" • \$15 (except Fridays) for the entire Biennial • Wed-Thurs 11am-6pm, Fri 1-9pm (6-9pm pay-what-you-wish admission), Sat-Sun 11am-6pm The documentary series on Iraq by Deep Dish TV is on exhibit at the Whitney. Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue (at 75th St), Manhattan

**Special SUPER GROOVY OFFER**

**\$25 FOR A WHOLE YEAR**

Bill me  Check enclosed

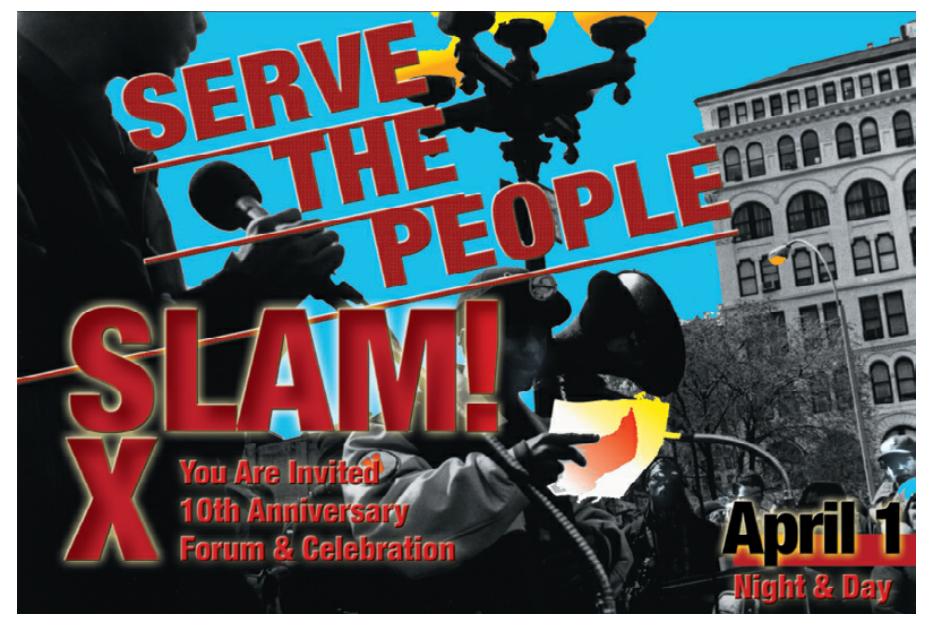
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Regular subscription rate: \$25/year (20 issues). Make checks payable to the NYC IMC Print Team and send to: P.O. Box 1417, New York, NY 10276. Or for even faster service email your address to [indysubs@yahoo.com](mailto:indysubs@yahoo.com) and we will begin your subscription right away!



**Friday, April 7**

\$12 suggested donation • 7:00pm

**FRED HO & THE AFRO ASIAN MUSIC ENSEMBLE**

In concert with el maestro poet Raul Salinas from Austin, Texas. Living legend "el maestro" and "poet laureate of the East Side" Raul Salinas, at over 72 years of age, is one of the preeminent poets of Chicano-Native American literature and a veteran revolutionary activist.

St. John's Lutheran Church, 155 Milton St, Greenpoint, Brooklyn • [www.jerichony.org](http://www.jerichony.org) • 212-760-4980

FREE • 10:00pm

**CENTRAL PARK MOONLIGHT RIDE**

Columbus Circle (SW corner of Central Park, at the intersection of Broadway, Central Park South/59th St, and Central Park West)

**Saturday, April 8**

FREE • 9:00pm

**PROSPECT PARK MOONLIGHT RIDE**

Grand Army Plaza, where Flatbush Ave, Eastern Pkwy, Union St and Prospect Park West all intersect. Sponsored by Times Up!

**Sunday, April 9 and Monday, April 10**

FREE • Sunday 2:00pm-12:00am, Monday 7:00pm-12:00am

**FREEDOM FESTIVAL**

The First Annual Freedom Festival is a totally free and completely independent music festival (bands in the lineup so far are Earl Greyhound, Vague Angels, Pyradical, Rockwell Rockwellian, The Exit, La Vernissagerie and Honky Tonk Happy Hour).

The Cake Shop, 152 Ludlow St • The Living Room, 154 Ludlow St, Manhattan

**Saturday, April 15**

FREE • 12:30pm

**SOUTH BRONX PEOPLE'S ENVIRONMENTAL TOUR**

Meet at Brook Park, 141st St and Brook Ave, the Bronx

**Wednesday, April 18**

FREE • 6:00pm-8:00pm

**LECTURE: THE HURRICANE AND THE NEW ORLEANS CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

With Dr. Laura Steinberg, former professor of Civil and Environmental Infrastructure at Tulane University; Aaron Vile, campaign director at the Gulf Restoration Network. Advanced registration is required; bring photo ID.

The Puck Building, 295 Lafayette St, 2nd Floor, Manhattan

**Thursday, April 19 thru Sunday, April 23**

**BROOKLYN UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL**

The Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Ave (at President St), Brooklyn • For schedule visit: [www.brooklynunderground.org](http://www.brooklynunderground.org) after April 1

**Saturday, April 22**

FREE • 9:30am

**THE EIGHTH ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE BIKES**

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, West 110th St and Amsterdam Ave, Manhattan

**Ongoing until May 28**

**SHOCKING & AWFUL**

FREE for solo viewing of the Peace Tower and "Shocking & Awful" • \$15 (except Fridays) for the entire Biennial • Wed-Thurs 11am-6pm, Fri 1-9pm (6-9pm pay-what-you-wish admission), Sat-Sun 11am-6pm</

# Enemy Mine

## Cambodian Veteran Wages War on Landmines

SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA—After driving for an hour in Aki Ra's beat-up Toyota down an unpaved road lined with drained rice patty fields, we come to a stop and start walking. We head north on a dirt path towards the Thai border and after another hour come to the edge of the dusty and endangered teak forest of Siem Reap Province.

The teak trees here are small and thus not prized in the illegal lumber trade. The landscape is devoid of animal life save for mosquito swarms, black flies and cicadas.

Crouching in the red dust of the forest floor, Aki Ra points through the thick underbrush. "I lived here as a soldier in 1987," he says, his quiet voice competing with screeching cicadas.

"I was 14 and I remember we would have bags on our backs, we could carry sometimes 50, sometimes 100 mines, and we would throw them behind us." He demonstrates, shuffling backwards.

"Sometimes the soldiers were so close we couldn't even bury the mines, we would just put leaves on top and keep going, if we were too slow we would, you know, be shot," he says as he squints, one eye down the barrel of an imaginary gun, and pulls the trigger.

In the mid-eighties this was an uninhabited swath of forest used largely as a battlefield. Since then, the small settlement of Chrun has grown up, housing 177 families of extremely poor peasants who squat this area and hope to create a farming village.

We're in a known minefield in the forest, perhaps one Aki Ra laid himself, and he's scratching intently at the hardened clay earth with a hatchet.

It takes him 20 minutes to locate the first mine, laying casually on the forest floor roughly 200 feet from Chrun's only source of water. It looks like a small green plastic toy, and it's hard to imagine that it's powerful enough to kill or maim. The forest buzzes and chirps as Aki Ra silently prepares his tools.

When ready he deftly picks up the Russian-made mine, turns it over and pries it open with a crude instrument he's fashioned for unscrewing mines. He pulls the detonators out with a pair of pliers, tosses the mine on the ground in front of him and slaps the top jubilantly with an open palm demonstrating that it is safe. The entire process takes less than a minute.



(from left) AKI RA'S DE-MINING TEAM includes Raen, an uncle of his who was also a Khmer Rouge soldier. They are trying out a metal detector but soon return to using sticks, feet and instinct to locate mines. THOUSANDS OF LANDMINES and unexploded ordnance disarmed by Aki Ra are displayed inside the museum. NEAR THE HISTORIC TEMPLE COMPLEX of Angkor Wat, sits the Land Mine Museum, established by Aki Ra and his wife Hourt. Here a girl, dressed in Khmer Rouge uniform, greets visitors at the entrance. Aki Ra dismantles a landmine near the village of Chrun in northwest Cambodia. PHOTOS: Alex Stonehill

With the location of the first mine, Aki Ra senses the pattern of the minefield around us. Suddenly the sun-dappled forest floor turns deadly as mine after mine is revealed just feet away, thoroughly camouflaged by leaves, dust and shade. "Many thousands of mines in this area," says Aki Ra, looking up from his work.

After dismantling a handful of mines Aki Ra has to turn back, though he brags that if given a full day he could disarm as many as 100. As he begins packing up in the fading light the high, soft singing of women washing laundry just paces away rises up into the dusky sky.

Aki Ra came to Chrun today not only to de-mine, but to talk with the villagers about training and paying them to do it themselves under his tutelage. This is a controversial prospect as many of the international agencies involved in de-mining feel that it is unsafe to de-mine without accreditation and argue that the choice of areas to de-mine must be made through careful analysis of planned post-clearance land use. Cambodian law prohibits the handling or dismantling of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and landmines by individuals without proper training.

It takes him 20 minutes to locate the first mine, laying casually on the forest floor roughly 200 feet from Chrun's only source of water. It looks like a small green plastic toy, and it's hard to imagine that it's powerful enough to kill or maim. The forest buzzes and chirps as Aki Ra silently prepares his tools.

When ready he deftly picks up the Russian-made mine, turns it over and pries it open with a crude instrument he's fashioned for unscrewing mines. He pulls the detonators out with a pair of pliers, tosses the mine on the ground in front of him and slaps the top jubilantly with an open palm demonstrating that it is safe. The entire process takes less than a minute.

"You have accidents because the standard operating procedure was not followed," says Rupert Leighton, country program manager for Mines Advisory Group (MAG). "There is a wrong and a right way to do this...we need to make sure that everyone is doing it as the rulebook is written," continues Leighton, whose organization succeeds in clearing 4.5 million square meters a year. MAG also trains villagers to de-mine their own land, but believes that it should be done in a standardized and approved manner.

Despite de-mining campaigns on the part of the United Nations beginning in '92 and a number of large NGO clearance projects, there are still millions of landmines, booby traps, and unexploded ordnance spread throughout the countryside. These dangerous remnants of war are especially concentrated along the border with Thailand and can result in as many as three to four accidents or deaths a day nationwide.

The Vietnamese Army that liberated Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge reached the northwestern regions much later than the rest of the country, and even then the fighting wasn't over for Aki Ra, who says that for most of his life he only understood the world as being perpetually at war. As a teenage conscript of the Vietnamese he would mine many of the areas he would later commit to de-mining.

March is the height of Cambodia's dry season and all over the country peasants are using fire to clear the land for planting rice when the



Chrun, a holdout of the Khmer Rouge until 1998, is only one example of how landmines and UXO still wreak havoc on the Cambodian people eight years after total peace was declared in the country.

Aki Ra is hardly the only one

in Cambodia involved in de-mining.

Two well-established NGOs and one government agency, armed with expensive equipment, large staffs and exhaustive safety procedures, do one-third of the country's de-mining.

The nature of their work, while extremely well organized and targeted for "maximum community impact," makes it impossible to respond to new landmine discoveries quickly, especially in remote villages like Chrun. Most de-mining is done by villagers on the spot, with whatever knowledge they have.

The majority of today's landmine victims are children sent out to collect firewood and graze livestock and who often play with the mines despite pervasive education campaigns.

Poverty and landmine accidents intersect in this country, which is one of the world's poorest.

Forty percent of Cambodia's population

lives below the poverty

line (set at less than 50 cents per day) and 75 percent

support themselves

by agriculture while

environmental resources

rapidly diminish.

As a result

of this economic desperation, many Cambodians, like the people of Chrun, cultivate land known to be mined. Others seek out

and attempt to

disarm

munitions

themselves and

sell the scrap

metal to

Thailand in an attempt to

# Landmine Orphan Gets a Second Chance

BY JESSICA PARTNOW

**S**IEM REAP, CAMBODIA—When Aki Ra met Chet in 2004, he had living on the streets of Phnom Penh, shining shoes to earn money and sniffing glue to curb his hunger. He'd lost his left leg in a land mine accident three years earlier and hadn't yet gotten the prosthesis he now happily shows off.

Even before losing his leg, Chet's life was never easy. He was born in a village in Kampong Cham Province, about 50 miles north of Phnom Penh.

He doesn't remember what his parents did, but his family was poor enough that he left at about age 10 for Phnom Penh in search of more money for food. His father died of an unknown illness in 2000. He thinks his mother is still alive, but he hasn't seen her since 2002.

Chet's accident came a year after his father's death, while he was tending cows near his village. He says he didn't see the landmine because it was dark.

He walked alone to a hospital, where his left leg was amputated just below the knee. Because he was able to walk the injury might have been slight enough to allow him to keep his leg, but amputation is the automatic response in Cambodia, and Chet is just one of thousands who have been injured by landmines.

Now at 15 or 16 with a barbed-wire tattoo and a street kid's demeanor, his tough guy posturing is belied by his open smile.

Aki Ra met Chet during a trip to Phnom Penh and invited him to live in the safety of the landmine museum on the condition that he stop sniffing glue and enroll in school. Chet agreed right away.

Chet is one of 20 children who live with Aki Ra and his wife Hourt at the Land Mine Museum, all victims of landmine accidents that either took a limb or left them orphans. Just on the other side of Siem



In addition to adopting 20 children orphaned or wounded by landmines, Aki Ra collects funds to establish schools in areas where he conducts de-mining work.

Reap's Red Light District, affectionately termed "Boom Boom Village," the museum offers a sanctuary for the adoptees as well as many village children.

Aki Ra sees his taking them in as a chance for them to change their lives, and hopes he can give them opportunities they might not otherwise have.

"If I can help eight or nine out of every ten children, it's better than nothing," he says. But with his limited funds he often has little more to offer them than what he can hunt in the jungle, a hammock in the museum and encouragement to attend school. Still it's better than life of the street.

Here, all of the kids get the chance to practice their English and Japanese on tourists, take language lessons from volunteers, or kick a soccer ball around the dusty tour bus parking lot across the road.

Chet is now off glue and in school. He is slated to receive one of the first college scholarships Aki Ra's organization has fundraised for landmine victims. Chet says he likes to go to school because Aki Ra tells him it will be good for his future, but his sheepish shrug reveals some ambivalence.

"All I really like to do is draw and make music."

for every mine he disarms, and by his calculation could de-mine the entire country in a span of five years, for under \$200,000.

"They will handle the mines regardless," he says, referring to the people of Chrun, "they have to, they don't have a choice. I just want to show them how to do it safely." In twenty years of handling and disarming mines, he has never had an accident.

Aki Ra's hands-on, man-with-a-plan

approach is not limited to de-mining. The Aki Ra Land Mine Action Museum, founded in 1999 on squatted land near the temples of Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, uses photos, statistics, collected landmines, and other war memorabilia to raise both landmine awareness and money for Aki Ra's projects.

Through tourists' donations he and his wife

Hourt raise just enough money to keep his de-mining going and manage to house 20 adopted landmine victims and their own two children. Occasionally he receives a generous individual donation, which he uses to build and fund rudimentary schools in the villages he's de-mined.

What Aki Ra does is hard to replicate. He is one man with specific knowledge, drive and talent. Many argue that his willingness to de-mine any place at any time is short-sighted. Larger NGOs prioritize high-traffic areas and ensure through their research that their work will not inadvertently serve renegades seeking to illegally deforest, or the army looking to set

up a new base. Still, Aki Ra says, a mine is a mine, and it shouldn't be in the land anywhere.

The source of Aki Ra's urgency is painfully visible. The human cost of landmines is evident throughout Cambodia, from one-legged vendors along the chaotic avenues of Phnom Penh to the armless teenagers haunting the ragged alleys of Siem Reap City. There are 27,000 victims of landmines in Siem Reap province alone.

Aki Ra's vision for his country doesn't end with de-mining. He wants to petition the government for unused land to start up a sustainable and eco-friendly farming villages for all the street people in Siem Reap.

But right now de-mining takes priority, a goal that is easily communicated in Aki Ra's simple slogan, "I want to make my country safe for my people," or perhaps even more poignantly by the poor villager of Chrun that simply said, "When the mines are cleared we can make a village for the people and then we can all make a living as farmers."

For more information on Aki Ra and the de-mining project, go to [commonlanguageproject.net](http://commonlanguageproject.net)

To contribute or learn how you can assist directly with the various projects, email [akiramineaction@gmail.com](mailto:akiramineaction@gmail.com)

## Cambodia Timeline

1954 King Norodom Sihanouk secures Cambodia's independence from France.

1963 Fearing government reprisals, Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders flee the capital of Phnom Penh for the countryside and shift their focus to building revolution among the peasantry.

1970 President Richard Nixon launches a brief invasion of Cambodia. Prime Minister Lon Nol overthrows Sihanouk in a CIA-supported coup. Cambodia, previously

neutral, is drawn into the Vietnam War. Hundreds of thousands of Cambodians are killed over the next three years by a U.S. bombing campaign that also shatters rural society, setting the stage for the rise of the Khmer Rouge.

1979 Pol Pot dies in a final Khmer Rouge stronghold in northwest Cambodia. Almost all Khmer Rouge leaders and troops have already defected to the new Cambodian government or been captured. The Khmer Rouge era is over, but Cambodia continues to be plagued by poverty, lack of infrastructure, upheavals over land rights and corruption.

—Alex Stonehill and IMC staff

